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Letter dated 27 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

Please find attached a letter dated 27 July 2015 from the Special Representative of the Syrian National Coalition to the United Nations, Najib Ghadbian, relating to the humanitarian situation in Syria (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as an official document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) François **Delattre**

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Annex to the letter dated 27 July 2015 from the Permanent Representative of France to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

[Original: English]

On behalf of the people of Syria and the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with great alarm that I draw to your attention the worsening humanitarian crisis in Syria, ahead of the briefing by the Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator to the Security Council on 28 July 2015.

Since the Under-Secretary-General last briefed the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in Syria, the atrocities perpetrated by Syrian regime forces have escalated, particularly in the area of Zabadani, where thousands of civilians are currently under siege by Syrian regime forces acting in concert with foreign terrorist groups. Since 3 July 2015, Syrian regime forces and Hezbollah terrorists have overseen a murderous assault on the opposition-held city, pounding Zabadani with more than 600 barrel bombs, or more than 30 bombs a day.

The regime's indiscriminate aerial attacks on Zabadani have reduced the town to rubble. They have also caused enormous suffering, taking the lives of men, women and children alike. Owing to their scale and intensity, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria has denounced the aerial attacks perpetrated by Syrian regime forces in Zabadani as "unprecedented". Sadly, however, the Syrian regime's aerial destruction has not been confined to Zabadani.

Regime aerial assaults, primarily via barrel bombs dropped from air force helicopters, continue to be the principal killer of Syrian civilians. From 1 to 27 July 2015, they accounted for no less than 60 per cent of all civilian deaths in the country, according to the Violations Documentation Centre in Syria. Throughout this period, the Syrian regime conducted daily air strikes in, among other areas, Rural Damascus, Aleppo, Idleb, Dar'a and Homs. In Aleppo alone, indiscriminate air strikes have caused scores of civilian deaths. For example, on 22 July, four barrel bombs struck the village of al-Bureij near al-Bab, killing at least 18 people, most of them civilians. A week before, 12 civilians were killed when Assad's warplanes pounded the town of Darat Aza with indiscriminate barrel bombs.

As Syrian regime forces have bombed civilians, so too have they denied civilians access to urgently needed medical care, as well as food and water. A total of 4.6 million Syrians are now living in hard-to-reach areas, and more than 167,500 people are besieged by Syrian regime forces in, among other areas, eastern Ghouta and Darayya. In Darayya alone, a Syrian regime siege has lasted for close to three years. The denial of humanitarian aid has been matched by attacks on medical facilities, the arbitrary detainment of human rights defenders and the systematic use of torture and sexual violence in Syrian regime prisons.

The atrocities perpetrated by Syrian regime forces constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity. They violate international humanitarian law, including Security Council resolutions 2118 (2013), 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014), 2191 (2014) and 2209 (2015), which demanded that Syrian authorities cease their indiscriminate aerial bombardment, including their use of barrel bombs.

Assad's indiscriminate aerial bombardment serves no purpose other than to terrorize, kill and maim innocent civilians. The Security Council has both a legal and moral obligation to stop such killing, including by:

1. **Supporting the establishment of safe zones inside Syria to protect civilians from Assad's indiscriminate aerial bombardment and from militant extremists alike**. Roughly 200 Syrians die each week from Assad's indiscriminate aerial bombardment. This figure could be brought down to zero were the Security Council to take the action needed to save lives and stop Assad's indiscriminate aerial bombardment;

2. **Vigilantly monitoring the Iranian nuclear deal** and Security Council resolution 2231 (2015), which, when implemented, could release billions of dollars to the Iranian regime. The Security Council must ensure that such resources are not allowed to fuel and arm the Syrian regime's killing machine;

3. **Referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court (ICC)**. Syrian regime forces and extremist terrorist groups such as ISIL continue to commit war crimes and crimes against humanity with impunity. An ICC referral would end impunity, deter further atrocities and bring justice to victims.

The Syrian crisis represents a direct threat to international peace and security. The Security Council has thus far failed to address or prevent that threat. On behalf of all the people of Syria, I urge you to support the actions needed to save the lives of my people and protect all Syrians from Assad's relentless aerial destruction.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations
National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces